





LETTER

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE

LORD BISHOP OF RIPON,

ON THE STATE OF PARTIES IN THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND.

BY

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LETTER TO THE RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD  
BISHOP OF RIPON.

MY LORD,

At the Meeting of the District Committee of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which was held in my parish on the 31st of March, and at which your Lordship kindly presided, I commenced a statement with reference to the condition of Parties in the Church of England, which your Lordship considered to be irrelevant to the purposes of the Meeting, and which, in obedience to your Lordship's command, I did not continue. But it seems to me that I was permitted to proceed so far in my statement as to render it expedient if not necessary for me to inform your Lordship and my Parishioners what it was that I intended to say, in order that I may not be misrepresented or misunderstood;

and this, with your Lordship's permission, I propose in the present letter to do. At the same time, my Lord, I wish it to be clearly understood that I have no intention whatever to question the propriety of your Lordship's conduct in interrupting me; for I can fully understand your Lordship's apprehensions on the subject. There was considerable excitement of feeling exhibited by my Parishioners assembled at the Meeting, from the circumstance of their having supposed that on a late occasion I had been unjustly attacked. Your Lordship evidently feared lest in proceeding with my statement I should excite that feeling still further. I can assure you, my Lord, that nothing was more distant from my intention; but my intention was unknown to you, and, bowing as I should do to the decision of the chairman under any circumstances, I felt peculiar pleasure in submitting to your Lordship's wishes, for of all your Clergy none can respect or reverence your Lordship more than myself.

I had stated to the Meeting, before I was interrupted, that we can no longer blind ourselves to the fact that the Church of England is now a divided body. It cannot be injudicious to say this when it is evident to all that the fact is as I have stated it to be. The most unhappy determination of the Hebdomadal Board at Oxford to censure Mr. Newman—a censure which I

have little doubt the convocation of the University would, if summoned, reverse—has proclaimed this from one end of the country to the other. The meeting of the Pastoral Aid Society in Leeds, which was regarded as a demonstration against me, the Vicar of the Parish,—a “rally,” as it has been called—declared it to my Parishioners. It would indeed be worse than affectation and a want of moral courage to deny what is evident to all.

It is a fact, an undeniable fact, that there are two Parties in the Church of England; the High Church Party and the Low Church Party. And the act of the Hebdomadal Board renders it absolutely necessary for us to range ourselves on the one side or on the other. That is to say, we must join that party with which in general principles we agree, and not desert it merely because we may think that a few individuals may have expressed themselves on some points incautiously, or have been hurried into acts which a colder and a calmer judgment may condemn. I cannot illustrate my position better than by mentioning what occurred to myself and to several other clergymen whose names I have no objection to mention in private to your Lordship. On the publication of the 90th Tract for the Times, I determined to point out in a pamphlet what I considered to be its errors. But the moment I heard that the writer was to

be silenced, not by argument, but by a usurped authority, that moment I determined to renounce my intention : that moment I determined to take my stand with him ; because, though I did not approve of a particular Tract, yet in general principles, in the very principle advocated in that Tract, I did agree with him : in a word, I was compelled by circumstances to act as a Party man. And in justice to one whom I am proud to call my friend, I am bound to say that Mr. Newman's explanatory Letter to Dr. Jelf is to my mind perfectly satisfactory.

What I maintain on this point is, that, under existing circumstances, we must become party men. We cannot halt between two opinions. We must take our side. Minor differences must be forgotten when our general principles are attacked.

Now, my Lord, the two Parties into which the Church of England is divided is, as I have said, the High Church Party and the Low Church Party. And on these I propose to make a few observations in a spirit which, I hope, will not, which I am sure ought not, to provoke controversy.

The High Church Party is accused by indiscriminating zealots of the Low Church Party of Popery : the Low Church Party is accused by indiscriminating zealots



of the High Church Party of Socinianism. And both accusations are false. For we all know that among those who hold Low Church views, the generality hate Socinianism as cordially as Popery is abominated by the generality of those who hold High Church views. But the accusation on either side would not have been made, or would not have been entertained, unless there was something of truth mixed up in it; and we must admit that in all principles, as held and applied by fallen man, there is a tendency to a vicious extreme.

Let us, then, candidly, and at once, admit that of High Church Principles the vicious extreme is Popery. I not only admit it, but proclaim it. As it would be absurd to deny that there is a division in the Church, so it would be worse than absurd to deny that, of High Church Principles, Popery is the vicious extreme. Most unfair, and most wicked, it is to accuse those of Popery who carefully avoid the extreme, and warn others against it, as being vicious; but when High Church Doctrines are very generally preached, when they are unconsciously held by men who profess to oppose them, perversions to Popery may be feared, and, therefore, ought to be guarded against. For what is Popery? It is the corruption of the Truth. We are not to suppose that men sat down, like Calvin or Socinus, and determined to form a system of Theology, and so produced

Popery. No. God's truth was held in God's Church for a long period, pure and uncorrupt. At length the Church became allied to the State; and its union with the world, highly important as that was, in order that the Church might discharge one of her offices, namely, that of being the Salt of the Earth, to season and to civilize Society, had also, too often, the ill-effect of introducing a worldly spirit into it. Men began to think of the Church as an important and useful Institution. Instead of acting towards her as dutiful children, they styled themselves Friends of the Church; and thought that they befriended her best, not when they assisted her in promulgating unpopular truths, but when they rendered her popular by inducing her to suppress what was contrary to the spirit of the age, and to adopt every innovation which the spirit of the age demanded. In deference to the spirit of the middle ages, which was superstitious, in order that the Church might become popular, that the number of its members might be increased, that weaker brethren might not be shocked, many of the high truths of religion, many ancient and primitive practices, were perverted to the purposes of superstition. The very Power of the Pope, in spiritual affairs, how did it originate? There were controversies and disputes, as among sinful men there always will be, and by those who cared not for the Truth, but desired only the temporal welfare of the

Church, it was desired that these controversies and disputes might be put an end to. For this purpose the Pope was permitted to usurp an authority to which he could not plead the shadow of a claim: he called himself the Head of the Universal Church, and those whom he could not silence by argument he silenced by authority.

But, not to proceed further on this point, I say that the Sin of Popery consists not in the deliberate invention of wrong doctrine, but in the gradual corruption of the Truth, the gradual perversion of what in practice was originally right. And while I do not deny that *corruptio optimi est pessima*; still I humbly contend that we are no more called upon, on this account, to give up the truth, or denounce practices primitive and apostolical, than the rich man is bound to give up his wealth because wealth is liable to be misapplied and so to involve the owner in endless misery.

I admit, then, fully, that the vicious extreme of High Church doctrine and practice is Popery; but I maintain at the same time that this is no reason why that doctrine and practice should be renounced. And now having said thus much on the vicious extreme on the High Church side, I proceed to a few remarks on the vicious extreme on the other side.

Now the distinguishing principle of the Low Church Party is the assertion of the sufficiency of private judgment in the interpretation of Scripture. The High Church Party take Holy Scripture for their guide, and in the interpretation of it defer to the authority of primitive antiquity: the Low Church Party contend for the sufficiency of private judgment. But if the sufficiency of private judgment be admitted, it follows that there is but one heresy, and that is the rejection of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. Receive the Scriptures, and then, on this principle, you are safe whatever construction you put upon them. The Socinian understands them in the sense which, by attention to minute criticism, by comparing them with what he witnesses of the Work of God in nature, and by consulting manuscripts and various versions he thinks they will bear. They who hold the sufficiency of private judgment, may discuss with him, but further than this they have no right to go if they would be consistent. They have no right to call any one a Heretic, who, receiving the Holy Scriptures, understands them to the best of his judgment. Hence it is that the tendency to Low Churchism is to Socinianism;—not that I mean to say that Low Churchmen may not hate Socinianism: but this is the *tendency*. Whenever Low Church principles are extensively prevalent, Socinianism is the result. Low Churchism was the prevalent system of

the last century. Many High-Establishment men were Low-Churchmen. And what was the last Century? It was the age of Socinianism. All Churchmen who held what would now be called liberal principles, were, like Hoadly, socinianized. All alterations of the Liturgy—all the reforms which were suggested as the means of strengthening the Church by the worldly friends of the Church, were projected with a view of enabling the Socinians, who formed the influential persons in most of our large towns, to conform. If the effect of preaching High Church doctrines be to create in weak minds a tendency to Popery, the prevalence of Low Church doctrines led to Socinianism—a soul-destroying heresy now almost extinct. Who, indeed, would now propose to alter the Liturgy to conciliate the Socinians?

I should, my Lord, had I been permitted to continue my address to the Meeting of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, have dilated, at some length, on the topics upon which I have now touched: on the fact that we are divided into two Parties, and that there is a vicious extreme on either side to be avoided. Of course, in my opinion the extreme on the Low Church side is the worst of the two; that is, Socinianism is worse than Popery. And my object in alluding to this would have

been to point out how we may look upon what we, at first, contemplate as an unmitigated evil in the light of an advantage. Doubtless, our divisions are permitted as the punishment of our sins. They are an affliction. But every punishment, and every affliction, if borne in piety, may become eventually a blessing. Our present division may have this salutary effect. It may place a barrier on either side. While both Parties are narrowly watched by their opponents, neither will be permitted to deviate in the extreme. Both Parties continuing in the Church of England, will receive her for their guide, and to her articles and formularies an appeal will be continually made. The accusing Party will not, indeed, be permitted to interpret those articles and formularies in his own sense, and then, begging the whole question to accuse his opponent of heterodoxy; but the accused Party will always find it necessary to make good his cause by shewing that he does not in reality depart from the common standard.

Thus may either party be the means of preventing the divergence of the other into an extreme,

I am sure, my Lord, that you will pardon me if here I pause to observe that an awful responsibility rests upon our spiritual rulers Most humbly and most

heartily do I pray that to them may be vouchsafed that spirit of wisdom and sound discretion which may enable them to moderate between parties without declaring themselves for either. And I have the less hesitation in venturing to say this to your Lordship since I know that such, as it has been hitherto, will ever continue to be your object. And guided by the wisdom and piety of our Bishops, we may hope to see both parties ere long united in many things: united in a full determination to resist Rome, while Rome continues as she now is, and, in the words of Mr. Newman, brings in another gospel: and at the same time united in so solemnizing her offices as to give free scope to those feelings of awe, mystery, tenderness, reverence, and devotion, which the Scriptures would excite, and which, if our Church were to neglect them, would lead men to Rome, who appeals to them: united, if not in reverence for antiquity, in filial love to our Mother the Church of England, through whose instructions, I agree with Professor Sewell in thinking, we who are her children are to imbibe Catholic truth: united in a desire to maintain a wholesome discipline in the Church, and through the Church to preach repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To a very great extent we are on these points already united;—the dispute is really how these ends can be best accomplished; and since on these points Parties are formed among us, I hope

that our chief rivalry will consist in an endeavour to show which system is most productive of gentleness and peace, and forbearance, and kindness, and Christian love : which system most conducive to purity of morals, to charity of sentiment, and to elevation of character. If we are to be engaged in controversies, I hope that they will not be conducted by evil speaking, lying, and slandering, which seem to be the besetting sins of the religious world ; nor by recourse to the petty manœuvres of political warfare ; nor by the bitterness of sarcasm ; nor by the vulgarity of ridicule ; nor by the rancour of personal hatred ; nor by insinuations which are known to be false, and which are only cowardly methods of stating an untruth : nor by attributing the worst motives where charity ought to suggest the best. No, let the weapons of our warfare be not carnal but spiritual : let them be sound arguments from the pure word of God, incessant prayer, and such good works as God hath prepared for us to walk in. In all the controversies in which the two Parties I have referred to may be engaged, it is always to be remembered that we are Brethren ; and I hope that while we contend for the truth, we shall contend, as brethren amicably discussing, not as foes engaged in deadly feud. It is not like a controversy between ourselves and those who are out of the Church : on many occasions we



must act together : we must often meet in friendly intercourse : our pulpits ought to be open to one another, with the understanding, of course, that we refer in our sermons on such occasions to the many points on which we agree, and not to the few on which we differ.

And here, perhaps, your Lordship will perceive how I might have brought my observations to bear upon the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge : I might have pointed out how, in a variety of ways, it is calculated to afford common ground on which both parties may meet. But into that subject I need not enter in this letter, though it would have afforded much matter for my speech. I will only here observe to your Lordship on the importance of maintaining the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in its neutral position. A Party exists which has introduced unhappy discussions into the Committee Room in London, and which is suspected of a desire to revolutionize the Society. The policy of the Standing Committee has hitherto been to conciliate and concede to this Party. But concession may be carried too far : and if the consciences of High Churchmen be violated, and they be compelled to withdraw from the Society, I do not doubt of their being

able to form a new Society more efficient than the old one, but I do dread the introduction of a fresh element of discord among us.

With every sentiment of affection, reverence, and respect, I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obliged and dutiful Servant,

W. F. HOOK.

Vicarage, Leeds, 1st April, 1841.

























